

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the twenty second part of the serial article, continuation from May 2023 newsletter.

In the city there were none who lied, for the king and the ministers set the example and the tone of *dhārmika* life. In that kingdom there were no rogues, none who broke rules for the sake of pleasure, none who would invade the sanctity of another's marriage. Ayodhya and the other cities of the kingdom were peaceful. Being ministers of Ayodhya, these fellows dressed and carried themselves appropriately, reflecting their stature. They were looked up to and not taken for granted. The ministers maintained a certain formality of dress along with their benign conduct. They always acted with the eyes of justice in service to their king. They acknowledged the virtues and consequence of the *gurus*. They were respected for their wise decisions even in distant courts and kingdoms. They were people of insight and never proud because of their virtues. It is pride that is the beginning of the end. They knew when to fight and when to negotiate. There is always a right time to wage war, and one must know when to withdraw – all in order to be victorious in the end. They were experts in all the sacred texts and in advising accordingly. In subtle matters, where abstract thinking is required, they were adept. The details of administration can destroy one's thinking powers, but these ministers were never overwhelmed by worldly concerns. They always kept the highest purpose in mind, mindful of the value structure. The laws of justice were known and applied with suitable interpretation required for the specific case involved. Mere rule is no good, all is to be interpreted. These ministers were those in whom all virtues abide, and they were the men who served the impeccable Dasharatha.

Dasharatha was married to three wives. The king was allowed, if he chose to, to marry more than one woman if no successor had been born. Otherwise, only *ekapatnī*. When there were no children to fulfill the royal succession it was important for the king to choose another wife. Dasharatha had three wives and no children. Dasharatha felt that the unbroken lineage of the *raghuvamśa* was going to

be snapped. It was a great dynasty that was threatened, the Solar dynasty. It would not be correct for this to come to an end. Nevertheless, Dasharatha did not seek a fourth marriage. Instead he chose *daivam*. A thought occurred to him that he should perform a ritual, the *aśvamedhayāga*, with the intent of gaining the birth of a child. *Aśvamedha* is not itself specifically intended for this purpose, but that intention, *saṅkalpa*, can be there for the blessing of a child. *Aśvamedha* is the last word in ritual. To complete it takes one full year. Only a king, and only a king with an abundant treasury, is a suitable patron and beneficiary for this ritual.

For the ritual, the king should send forth a riderless horse. An army should accompany the horse wherever it goes. No other kingdom around should be able to touch the horse. If someone ropes the horse and captures him there is a fight. The horse, the sacred horse, should freely go for one year and then return. He should move about the entire empire. Then with that horse the great sacrifice is done. All the *devatās* are invoked. The *brāhmaṇas* and *ṛtviks*, everyone is given gifts. The gifts received will support each recipient for an entire year. We see that here with all the collected Halloween candy that a mother only gradually doles out to her children. The *dakṣiṇā* from a great ritual will keep everyone going for months. All the kings are called, and they come and are respectfully received and they are given gifts. They bring gifts as well. It is a huge affair, a one-year celebration. This is what Dasharatha planned. Only an established and accomplished and confident king will sponsor this ritual. For if it fails, that king loses face, and it is not good. The *yāga* must be done properly, exactly, whereby the king will gain the blessing. Improperly done, the king loses his life, automatically. It cannot be done by every king.

Dasharatha consulted with Vashistha, and Vasishtha said, “Okay, that will be a good thing. We will do it.”

The ministers and the other Brahmans and those well-versed in the *śāstra* were consulted. All agreed, “The time is good; we should do it now. We should perform the *aśvamedhayāga*. Let the horse go.”

Dasharatha's minister Sumantra, the king's close personal advisor, who at times drove Dasharatha's chariot, told the king a story of a great *brāhmaṇa*, Rshyashrngā. Rshyashrngā had grown up in the forest, serving and learning at the feet of his father Vibhandaka, a great sage. Rshyashrngā had never crossed beyond the forest. He lived on fruits and roots and leaves, and he knew nothing of the outside world. His father was an invalid and required the boy's constant attention. As a grown up young man, Rshyashrngā had no experience with women or with the world.

In the forest where Rshyashrngā lived with his father there ruled a king named Romapada. Romapada was a negligent king. In his realm there were no rains, there was famine, and other problems. If a ruler rules properly, *dharma* will be there, the deities all do their jobs. If a king does not do his duties, he will find the whole order, all harmony, is disturbed. The *rājaguru* advised King Romapada, "Hey, you must go and get that Rshyashrngā if you want to straighten things out here. That boy is a *tejasvī*; if he just enters your kingdom the sustaining rains will come at the proper time. You must have him marry Shanta, your daughter, for all to turn out well." The king knew the *brāhmaṇa* boy would not come just because they wanted him to. The boy, a *brahmacārī*, had his own activities, as well as his father to look after. Moreover the boy would probably run away if he saw unfamiliar people approaching. The *rājaguru* said, "Gradually you must convince him. Send the right people to entice him." It was girls who were sent to retrieve Rshyashrngā.

The girls brought fruits and sweet sandwiches and all they could carry. When they got to the forest they cooked delicious fresh food. They went to the hut where Rshyashrngā was helping his father. When the boy came out, he saw these strange people. He was astonished at their dress and their ornaments. For him it was all a new thing. He approached and carefully looked them over, "I have never seen such animals before. They seem to be like people, but they are entirely different." Young as he was, something welled up inside of him. That was Brahmaji's

trick. Something welled up inside and began working. He did not recognize this nice feeling. He found that he was fascinated but unsure how to deal with this situation.

The girls asked, "Who are you?"

Words he knew brought the boy back to this world, and he said, "I am Rshyashrngā. I live here with my father. Please come and see our place."

They all came to the simple hut in the forest. Rshyashrngā offered the girls the fruits and simple things that he had. In turn they gave him the things they had brought. Unfamiliar with these foods, he thought the cooked grains and rice and breads were all fruits, some of them soft, some of them crunchy. He enjoyed them all and finished them. Then the girls turned and went away. The next morning, Rshyashrngā finished serving his father and returned to place where he had first met the strangers the previous day. He could not resist the attraction. The plotters from the kingdom were there waiting. They knew he would come, and they knew they had trapped him by what he had seen and sensed. Again they fed the boy, and then they said, "Why don't you come to our *āśrama*? We have more fruits for you." The boy followed out of the forest and to the king's palace. He was amazed at all he saw that was new to him. Even as he entered the royal city the heavens all broke and the beneficial rains came.

Romapada and his *rājaguru* saw the rains and knew this special boy had arrived in the kingdom. One good fellow, *sādhu*, completely innocent, sage-like, free of *rāgadveṣa*, had come. The boy was brought before Romapada and offered salutations. He was asked to marry Shanta. Rshyashrngā did not know what marriage was but he learned quickly. With the blessings of his father he did marry the princess. He became a great *śāstrajñā* and a great *ṛṣi* as a *gṛhastha* there in Romapada's kingdom. It was this Rshyashrngā who came to preside over and advise and conduct the *ṛtviks* and Dasharatha in the performance of the *aśvamedhayāga*. His presence assured that the ritual would be complete and that King Dasharatha would gain the blessing of a child. There would be no doubt about it. The whole thing

had been the portent of Sanatkumara, who foretold the story of Rshyashrngā and Dasharatha's eldest son. Dasharatha and Romapada had become friends as Romapada's fortunes had improved. With his three queens, the king of Ayodhya visited Romapada. He asked that Rshyashrngā and Shanta come to Ayodhya for the sacrifice. Romapada said, "No problem. That is a good thing. *Tathāstu.*" That is how Rshyashrngā came to preside at Dasharatha's *aśvamedhayāga*.

When the horse returned after being released for twelve months, the ritual site was prepared on the banks of the River Sarayu. Rshyashrngā was the *brahmā*, the supervising priest. The other qualified priests are the *hotā*, *adhvaryu*, and *udgātā*. The *hotā* invokes the gods by reciting the Rgveda *mantras*. The *adhvaryu* measures the ground for the altar and collects the sacrificial vessels, fetches wood and water, and lights the fire while reciting *mantras* from the Yajurveda. The *udgātā* chants the hymns of the Samaveda. The explicit instructions for the ritual procedure are held in the Kalpa Sutras. The sequence is given in the Mimamsa Shastra. There are minor and auxiliary rites conducted in addition to the principal. In the morning the Soma, juice of a specified and sanctified vine, is pressed with stones from its plant and offered to Indra. It is his preferred fare. This extraction ritual is the Savana, and it is done three times. With that and the proper *mantras*, Indra and the gods are invoked into the sacrificial hall. Along with the *devatās*, all priests, all ascetics, all Brahmans, all nobles, all *brahmacārīs*, and all attendees were fed and made comfortable through the offerings of the sponsor-king.

There are differences between the *aśvamedha* and other rituals, different materials and different instructions. In the Kalpa Sutras and in the Brahmanas, the first Savana, the Soma extraction, is called Chatushtoma or Jyotishtoma. The second is called Ukthya. That of the third day is Atiratra. For the *aśvamedha* there are sacrificial pillars made of different specified woods, including Bilva. The pillars are twenty-one in number, scripturally prepared, octagonal and smooth, plated with gold, covered with cloth, worshipped with flowers and sandal-paste. Clay bricks of a prescribed size were baked and used to build the altar. All who worked

with these materials were eligible by birth and learning. The altar took the shape of the divine sky-being Garuda, his wings and tail distended, his head looking downward facing east. The sacrificial fire would burn in that altar. Eighteen fire-pits are in the altar of the *aśvamedha*, six in less complicated rituals. The *aśvamedha* of Dasharatha was an extended affair. Jyotishstoma and Ayushstoma, two rounds of Atiratra, Abhijit and Vishvajit and two rounds of Aptoryama were the eight great sacrifices supporting the *aśvamedha*.

In order to maintain the *kuladharmā*, his family lineage, Dasharatha had done one of the most expensive, difficult, drawn out rituals, the *aśvamedhayāga*. The smallest ritual is called *agnihotra*, the largest is *aśvamedha*, all others are in-between. They would say that, “*Agnihotra to aśvamedha.*” All the materials required for the ritual were gathered and offered as oblations, and the sacrifice was completed according to the *sāstra* by the *ṛtviks*. Dasharatha and Rshyashrnga were happy that it had been well done. Raja Dasharatha venerated Rshyashrnga and said to him, “By this you are now qualified to bless me with a son or sons and to preserve the succession of the Ikshvaku family.”

ततोऽब्रवीदृष्यशृङ्गं राजा दशरथस्तदा ॥ १-१४-५८

कुलस्य वर्धनं तत् तु कर्तुमर्हसि सुव्रत । तथेति च स राजानमुवाच द्विजसत्तमः ।

भविष्यन्ति सुता राजंश्चत्वारस्ते कुलोद्धवाः ॥ १-१४-५९

स तस्य वाक्यं मधुरं निशम्य प्रणम्य तस्मै प्रयतो नृपेन्द्रः ।

जगाम हर्षं परमं महात्मा तमृष्यशृङ्गं पुनरप्युवाच ॥ १-१४-६०

tato'bravīdṛṣyaśṛṅgaṁ rājā daśarathastadā ॥ 1-14-58

kulasya vardhanam tat tu kartumarhasi suvrata | tatheti ca sa rājānamuvāca dvija-sattamaḥ |

bhaviṣyanti sutā rājanścatvāraste kulodvahāḥ ॥ 1-14-59

sa tasya vākyam madhuraṁ niśamya praṇamya tasmai prayato nṛpendraḥ |

jagāma harṣam paramam mahātmā tamṛṣyaśṛṅgaṁ punarapyuvāca ॥ 1-14-60

Rshyashrnga, most exalted among the *brāhmaṇas*, said, “*Tathāstu*. Let it be. Those who will carry the royal name into the future will be born to you. You

asked for one, you will be blessed with four.” Dasharatha, king of kings, was greatly pleased hearing these fulfilling words from a *brāhmaṇa*. With great *śraddhā*, faith, in the *mahātmā*’s words, Dasharatha rejoiced at this blessing.

मेधावी तु ततो ध्यात्वा स किञ्चित्तिदमुत्तरम् । लब्धसंज्ञस्ततस्तं तु वेदज्ञो नृपमब्रवीत् ॥ १-१५-१

इष्टिम् तेऽहं करिष्यामि पुत्रीयां पुत्रकारणात् । अथर्वाशिरसि प्रोक्तैर्मन्त्रैः सिद्धां विधानतः ॥ १-१५-२

medhāvī tu tato dhyātvā sa kiñcitidamuttaram ।

labdhasañjñastatastam tu vedajño nṛpamabravīt ॥ 1-15-1

iṣṭim te’haṁ kariṣyāmi putrīyāṁ putrakāraṇāt ।

atharvaśirasi proktairmantraiḥ siddhāṁ vidhānataḥ ॥ 1-15-2

Rshyashrnga, the wise man, the one who knows the *veda* very well, the *medhāvī*, he of great memory, closed his eyes in thought. Then as though coming back to this world, having seen inside what was right, Rshyashrnga again spoke to Dasharatha, “By the *mantras* of the *arthaveda* it is said that the ritual known as *putrakāmeṣṭi* is done for the sake of bringing forth a son. O king, I will perform for you this ritual according to that *veda*.” All the preparations were done, and Rshyashrnga did that ritual as it was and is to be done. That too was a successful ritual.

In the meantime, Valmiki’s story goes somewhere else. It goes to the *loka*. All the various *devas* and *yakṣas*, the various celestials, go to Lord Brahmaji and pray to him, the father of all parents, “Hey, *pitāmah*, the people are all suffering at the hands of this great *asura* Ravana. Ravana has given a great deal of *tapas* to you, O Lord, and you gave that Ravana the great boon of being invulnerable to *rākṣasas asuras devas kinnaras*. You gave him this boon that none of these fellows could kill him. This has made Ravana very confident that he cannot be defeated. Now he is taking advantage of this boon and creating turmoil among the *devas* and the *ṛṣis*. Brahmaji, we ask you to do something about this.”

तेन गन्धर्वयक्षाणां देवतानां च रक्षसाम् ।

अवध्योऽस्मीति वागुक्ता तथेत्युक्तं च तन्मया ॥ १-१५-१३

*tena gandharvayakṣāṇāṃ devatānāṃ ca rakṣasām |
avadhyo'smīti vāguktā tathetyuktaṃ ca tanmayā || 1-15-13*

Brahmaji agreed to do something, “Yes, I gave him this boon, but he should not be using it to be a problem. What we need now is to find the right man, a human being. Only a human being can destroy this potent *rākṣasa* and get things back on track.”

You now see what's behind the action. There are many forms, many *upādhis*. *Rākṣasa upādhi*, *deva upādhi*, none of these Brahmaji mentioned in the boon can deal with the *ahaṅkāra*. Only a human *upādhi* is capable of this task. *Adhikārī* is only this human *upādhi*.

Nobody else can destroy this *rākṣasa* Ravana. In a human being alone all the strength that is necessary to destroy this *rākṣasa* can be found. Such a human being, who is he? Who can set things straight? To answer this, the *devatās* go to Lord Vishnu. In fact Lord Vishnu, he whose job it is to sustain the creation with *dharma*, comes to them. The *devatās* all complain to him about what has been happening. Lord Vishnu gives them their answer: Vishnu himself will take human form as what is called an *avatāra*. We will talk about this in detail when we study Bhagavad Gita. There is no *karma* involved on the part of the *avatāra*. Others may use the term “divine incarnation.” The incarnation is not of a *jīva*, it is just out of *māyā*. Ishvara himself is the *māyāvīśeṣa* from which an *avatāra* is born. The prayers of the people are the only *karma*, and the *avatāra* is the *karmaphala* of those prayers. The Lord assumes a particular form. If, with his *māyā*, he can create a world, the Lord can create and assume another form. The *avatāra* is Ishvara's form, with particular *upādhi viśeṣas*, certain divine attributes and powers. This is found in every religion all over the world; *avatāra* is there. *Avatāra* means “he comes down.” Without being compelled to be born due to the force of *karma*, born because of his own choice - that kind of a birth is called *avatāra*. An *avatāra* is not a *jīva*, that is why he is worshipped. Even though an *avatāra* in time will be dead and gone, as is true for Rama, *avatāras* are not objects of worship in the same way that manes, *pitṛs*, are.

Avatāras are not worshipped with the rituals and *mantras* of the dead. Rama's birthday is celebrated, but not his death day, because *avatāras* are not *jīvas*. They are objects of worship, and the worship goes to Ishvara. This is the story of how Rama is an *avatāra* of Lord Vishnu.

भयं त्यजत भद्रं वो हितार्थं युधि रावणम् । सपुत्रपौत्रं सामात्यं समन्त्रिज्ञातिबान्धवम् ॥ १-१५-२८

हत्वा क्रूरं दुराधर्षं देवर्षीणाम् भयावहम् । दशवर्षसहस्राणि दशवर्षशतानि च ॥ १-१५-२९

वत्स्यामि मानुषे लोके पालयन् पृथिवीमिमाम् । एवं दत्त्वा वरं देवो देवानां विष्णुरात्मवान् ॥ १-१५-३०

मानुष्ये चिन्तयामास जन्मभूमिमथात्मनः । १-१५-३१

bhayaṁ tyajata bhadraṁ vo hitārthaṁ yudhi rāvaṇam |

saputrapautraṁ sāmātyaṁ samantriññātibāndhavam || 1-15-28

hatvā krūraṁ durādharṣaṁ devarṣiṇām bhayāvaham |

daśavarṣasahasrāṇi daśavarṣaśatāni ca || 1-15-29

vatsyāmi mānuṣe loke pālayan pṛthivīmimām |

evaṁ datvā varaṁ devo devānām viṣṇurātmaṁvān || 1-15-30

mānuṣye cintayāmaśa janmabhūmimathātmanaḥ |1-15-31

Lord Vishnu is asked by all the *devas* to do something about the earthly *rākṣasa* who is consistently acting outside the *dharma* and overpowering those who follow *dharma*. Things being as they are, only a human being can destroy Ravana. Lord Vishnu agreed to take care of it, "I will be born in a four-fold way. Half of me will be on earth as one person, and the other half will be born into three. Thus I will be born as four sons to proper parents, to parents who deserve it." Ravana has asked for it, and now he is going to get it. The *ahaṅkāra* is to be destroyed because the Lord is to assume a human form now. "*Bhayaṁ tyajata*, abandon fear," says Lord Vishnu to the *devas*. "Everything will change. In a legitimate battle this fierce and evil Ravana, along with his hoods, the entire race of demons, including all their ministers who advise them of the right time to do the wrong thing, will be gone. In the world of men, this earth, for ten thousand years plus one thousand years I will be there."

Thus Lord Vishnu set in motion the whole plan of where and how he was

to be born. When the *putrakāmeṣṭi* was over, the Lord decided to come to Dasharatha's family as four sons of the king's three wives. There is another story there. When Lord Brahmaji came to know that Vishnu was going to take an *avatāra*, he called together all the *devatās*. He told them, "Hey, you, do not just lay low. With your special powers make special monkeys. Each of these *vānaras* will be a *devatāviśeṣa*. Each will have the powers of the *devatā*. With Indra's power, the power of the god of battle, this Sugriva will be born. Vayu's, the wind god's, power will be in this Hanuman. All the powers of all the demi-gods will be available in these other special monkeys."

Due to their powers the *devatās* entered the wombs of the monkeys and were born as a hundred thousand elephant-sized monkeys. Walking and talking monkeys, unheard of before, were all there. Not just climbing trees and coming down, these monkeys could fly down and lift the trees out of the ground. These *vānaras* were bright and well-informed. They were *kāmarūpīs* who could assume different forms. Thus the Vanaras were born, born to help Rama.

Now go back to the *yāgaśālā*, the place where the ritual was going on. From where the *yāga* came, from the altar, from the fire, from the sacred grass, came a celestial being, a shining being carrying a golden vessel filled with *pāyasaṃ*, milk boiled with rice and sugar. The celestial addressed King Dasharatha, "Take this blessing given by the *devatās* you invoked at this ritual. Ask your wives to partake of this." This was done.

According to Rshyashrnga's instruction, Dasharatha gave one half of the *pāyasaṃ* to Queen Kausalya. The other half was divided into thirds and given. Sumitra took two thirds. Kaikeyi took one. All were well-pleased at the blessing and at the prospect of the births to come. Rshyashrnga and Shanta were honored and praised and given fine gifts, and they went off to their homeland.

ततो यज्ञे समाप्ते तु ऋतूनां षट् समत्ययुः । ततश्च द्वादशे मासे चैत्रे नावमिके तिथौ ॥ १-१८-८
नक्षत्रेऽदितिदैवत्ये स्वोच्चसंस्थेषु पञ्चसु । ग्रहेषु ककटे लग्ने वाक्पताविन्दुना सह ॥ १-१८-९

प्रोद्यमाने जगन्नाथं सर्वलोकनमस्कृतम् । कौसल्याजनयदœ रामं दिव्यलक्षणसंयुतम् ॥ १-१८-१०
 विष्णोरर्धं महाभागं पुत्रमैक्ष्वाकुनन्दनम् । लोहिताक्षं महाबाहुं रक्तोष्ठं दुन्दुभिस्वनम् ॥ १-१८-११
 कौसल्या शुशुभे तेन पुत्रेणामिततेजसा । यथा वरेण देवानामदितिर्वज्र पाणिना ॥ १-१८-१२
 भरतो नाम कैकेय्यां जज्ञे सत्यपराक्रमः । साक्षादœ विष्णोश्चतुर्भागः सर्वैः समुदितो गुणैः ॥ १-१८-१३
 अथ लक्ष्मणशत्रुघ्नौ सुमित्राजनयत् सुतौ । वीरौ सर्वास्त्रकुशलौ विष्णोरर्धसमन्वितौ । १-१८-१४
 पुष्ये जातस्तु भरतो मीनलग्ने प्रसन्नधीः । सार्षे जातौ तु सौमित्री कुलीरेऽभ्युदिते रवौ ॥ १-१८-१५
 राज्ञः पुत्रा महात्मानश्चत्वारो जज्ञिरे पृथक्œ । गुणवन्तोऽनुरूपाश्च रुच्या प्रोष्ठपदोपमाः ॥ १-१८-१६
 जगुः कलं च गंधर्वा ननृतुश्चाप्सरोगणाः । देवदुन्दुभयो नेदुः पुष्पवृष्टिश्च खात् पतत् ॥ १-१८-१७

tato yajñe samāpte tu ṛtūnām ṣaṭ samatyayuh |
tataśca dvādaśe māse caitre nāvamike tithau || 1-18-8
nakṣatre'ditidaiivatye svocasamstheṣu pañcasu |
graheṣu karkaṭe lagne vākpatāvindunā saha || 1-18-9
prodyamāne jagannātham sarvalokanamaskṛtam |
kausalyājanayad rāmaṁ divyalakṣaṇasamyutam || 1-18-10
viṣṇorardham mahābhāgaṁ putramaikṣvākunandanam |
lohitākṣam mahābāhum raktoṣṭham dundubhisvanam || 1-18-11
kausalyā śuśubhe tena putrenāmitatejasā |
yathā vareṇa devānāmaditirvajra pāṇinā || 1-18-12
bharato nāma kaikeyyām jajñe satyaparākramah |
sākṣād viṣṇoścaturbhāgaḥ sarvaiḥ samudito guṇaiḥ || 1-18-13
atha lakṣmaṇaśatrughnau sumitrājanayat sutau |
vīrau sarvāstrakuśalau viṣṇorardhasamanvitau | 1-18-14
puṣye jātastu bharato mīnalagne prasannadhīḥ |
sārpe jātau tu saumitrī kulīre'bhyudite ravau || 1-18-15
rājñah putrā mahātmānaścavāro jajñire pṛthak |
guṇavanto'nurūpāśca rucyā proṣṭhapadopamāḥ || 1-18-16
jaguh kalam ca gandharvā nanṛtuścāpsarogaṇāḥ |
devadundubhayo neduh puṣpavṛṣṭiśca khāt patat || 1-18-17

Things are counted differently now than in the time of the Ramayana. Ordinarily they counted ten months for gestation, but here there are two more because this is not an ordinary *garbha*. Twelve months after the *yāga*, on the ninth day of

the springtime month *chaitra*, when the stars and planets were in auspicious alignment, five planets exalted in five houses, Cancer the ascendant, Rama, the one who is the protector of the world, who is the refuge of all people, who has all the divine characteristics, the glory of Vishnu, the endowed one, who blesses the family of Ikshvaku, was born the son of Kausalya. The child was brilliant, with an air of wisdom and timelessness and mature love. His mother was certain that this was the divine product of the great sacrifice. She found it difficult to even touch this exceptional boy. When she did hold him, her own face shone with the effulgent brilliance of the boy, just as the face of one who sits in the dark holding a burning candle will shine. She became even more beautiful. That baby was Rama, the eldest. When Aditi, the sun, held her son Indra, he who was born with the bright *vajra* weapon in his hands, she sparkled. The same was true of the lustrous Kausalya cradling her resplendent son.

Born to Kaikeyi was Bharata, a son with the wealth of Vishnu and characteristics of a great person. To Sumitra were born a part of Vishnu. Masters of weaponry, brave and strong, Lakshmana and Shatrughna were born the third and fourth sons of Dasharatha. This is the order of the births, they say. Like the four inseparable constellations that beam down from above, none could say which of these four sons was more luminous or wonderful to behold. The *nāmakarma* was done, and names were given by Vasishtha, *guru* of the family. The gods were pleased, and flowers sprinkled down from the heavens as rain. In Ayodhya the entire city was festive, and the roads were crowded with people, celebration, dance and music. The whole place was one of happy noise and music and excitement. According to the tradition, Dashartha distributed gifts to all the scholars and worthy others. We have the four brothers now.

To be continued...